

# The Friendly Haven



## ANNUAL REPORT 2020

The Friendly Haven



# SUMMARY

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This was a challenging year for the world as well as for those we are taking care of in Africa, where numerous COVID-related restrictions have had a huge impact on the daily life of people. In addition, Togo held its presidential election at the beginning of 2020; traditionally, the overall situation tends to be potentially tense at that time.

However, thanks to your support, we have been able to continue our actions for the children and foster families despite challenging circumstances. This is a great achievement for our association in such a context, thus highlighting how important your support and solidarity are. Many thanks to you!



## I – The Hope Foster Home, in short:

The Hope Foster home orphanage in Togo is located in the Amou prefecture, at a distance of about 10 km from Atakpamé, between the Aveté and Avedjé villages.

The centre has been operational since 2014 with the key objective of supporting children who are orphans, abandoned or whose parents are impoverished or suffer from major handicaps.

**The Hope Foster Home has been recognized by the Togolese State as the best performing orphanage in the highland region, and among the five best in the whole of Togo, according to a report of the ENEIS research unit commissioned by the Ministry of Social Action, Family and Literacy Promotion as well as UNICEF (April 2016)**



The operation of the orphanage has been made difficult since 2017. Following the malevolent actions of our former local partner—the RAGC association—the orphanage premises have been temporarily closed in August 2017 and still remain closed. However, we have ceaselessly continued to support 21 children (6 girls and 15 boys) whom we follow up, providing assistance for school tutoring, payment of school fees and school supplies, food, health and clothing and payment for exceptional major expenses such as eyeglasses or serious physical or psychological diseases. We have also been supporting the kids’ foster families, their brothers and sisters and the children near the place we have rented in Atakpamé, pending the reopening of the orphanage. This encompasses at least 200 people in total.

In the meantime, we are fighting to have the trial against the leaders of the RAGC association eventually take place so that we can reopen our orphanage. Legal proceedings are extremely slow, even more so now with the impact of COVID. This is very disappointing and we have undertaken whatever is possible to get them accelerated. This is a matter of time and patience until we see justice done.



In spite of this long closure, we have never lost hope to recover our orphanage.

We undertake maintenance and weeding work every year to avoid the risk of damage or of a fire during the dry season.

## II – Our activities in Togo in 2020 :

Our activities were exercised in different fields throughout the year. They included:

- Meeting the children and the families
- Distributing food supplies as a support during the COVID 19 pandemic
- Distributing food supplies as a support during the potentially risky election period of February 2020
- Preparing for the start of the school year 2020/2021
- Workshops to raise awareness on non-violence on children
- Christmas celebration



### II.1 Monthly meetings and payment of allowances

Meetings with the children and the families have been organized in the offices of The



Friendly Haven on a monthly basis. It is an opportunity to discuss and exchange views, and also to have lunch together like a large family. We have adapted these meetings since the arrival of the pandemic in Togo in February, in line with the precautionary measures decided by the government. However, every family has continued to receive a monthly allowance to cover their basic needs.







## II.2 Distribution of food supplies in time of COVID and during the period of elections

The world has been suffering from a sanitary crisis for one year now. Unfortunately, the pandemic has a devastating socio-economic impact in Africa and elsewhere: many people are out of work and their financial situation is critical.

In this context, in addition to the usual payment The Friendly Haven makes to each family each month, an additional support has been deemed necessary because of the impact of the COVID crisis.



The Friendly Haven therefore provided food and hygiene support to the 21 families (some 84 children) under the form of rice, cooking oil, sugar, tomato concentrates and soap. A similar support was provided in January 2020 during the period of elections in Togo, a period traditionally subject to uncertainties and risks of possible troubles. Unsurprisingly, the incumbent president, Mr. Faure Gnassingbé, was reelected.



### II.3 Preparation for the beginning of the 2020/2021 school year

The beginning of the school year rhymes with the end of the summer holidays and, every year, it also brings its share of expenses: new school supplies, new school bag, new school uniform, etc.



The Friendly Haven has never failed to be there to relieve the foster families from these expenses, which represent a real headache for the majority of often destitute people in the Atakpamé area.

Additionally, the beginning of the 2020/2021 school year took place in the difficult context of the COVID 19 pandemic which has depleted the purse of most households in Togo. This motivated The Friendly Haven to bring help to 29 children in addition to the 21 children we regularly support: they are members of the foster families and children of the neighbourhood of our Atakpamé office.







## II.4 Workshops to raise awareness on non-violence on children

The definition of violence by UNICEF is the one provided by article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of Children, namely “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse”.

To support children in a situation of vulnerability, especially orphans and children subject to mistreatment and abuse, by supporting their development and fulfilment, such is The Friendly Heaven’s vision. To put this vision into practice, our association swung into action with the help of the **Non-Violence XXI** foundation to organize two awareness workshops to enhance non-violence in schools, families and communities in Atakpamé. The programme of our workshops includes debates, theatre-forums, simulations, games, songs, heartwarming lunches... joy supporting the evolution of mentalities which still remain fossilized in that respect.



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## II.5 Christmas celebration

Christmas is the most magical time for children! Every year, it is the most eagerly-awaited and enchanting celebration. The Friendly Haven has never missed it, as it conveys a message of hope and affection to these orphans.



**On the agenda:** meal, gifts, games, songs and dance.



The Friendly Haven's objective has been reached thanks to our donors from different countries. There was joy and cheerfulness.





### III - Programmes in Rwanda and D.R. Congo

**In Rwanda**, we have over many years ceaselessly supported Kizito Mihigo, a young peace and reconciliation activist, during his years of imprisonment and, when he was freed, in his actions in favour of destitute children.

In the night of February 16-17, 2020, our dear Kizito, who was threatened in his personal safety, tried to flee the country. He was arrested by police, transferred to a police station in the capital city where he was found dead the following day. Police claimed it was a suicide. This did not make sense, as it was a cover up for what obviously was a murder. The police version was struck down by all the human rights advocates, and even the Church of Rwanda organized his funeral with great pomp and circumstance.

His death caused us great sorrow which has been lingering on. He was for us like a family member. Together with some of his friends, we collected funds in order to get his book published, a book he had written about his life and his imprisonment, with a prophetic title: “Rwanda, to embrace reconciliation in order to live in peace and have a happy death”. Progressively, his friends have splintered after harsh internal quarrels. Our association decided to distance from them for decency and security reasons.

In order to pursue his endeavour, we invite all of you to order his outstanding book on Amazon. We will continue to speak of him with conviction and love: he died at the age of 38, offering an exemplary life journey to the world.



*Picture taken in Brussels in 2006, with the chairperson of the Friendly Haven*

As regards our activities in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, in the eastern part of the country where a nefarious civil war continues to prevail, with very little coverage by the media, we have been continuing to help our field partner at our very modest scale. This field partner is the ACMEJ association which works together with our traditional partner in D.R. Congo, the remarkable Swiss association VIVERE. It provides medical assistance to the women, girls and babies who have been subject to rape, torture and sexual mutilations. Our first and foremost priority is their survival and the redress of those humiliated and tortured bodies. We wish we can receive donations specifically dedicated to this essential cause.

PROJET A VENIR



## IV- Our projects for the future

Our overriding priority in Togo is and remains to reopen our orphanage, ceaselessly pursuing our legal proceedings to that effect.

We do hope that 2021 will at long last be the year allowing us to reopen this haven of happiness and peace to the children. When this happens, it will be essential to make the necessary repairs prior to its actual reopening. It will also be imperative to find international partners to support us in our undertakings. We are very well aware that, in the current context, operating an orphanage only with our available resources would look too ambitious. In the meantime, it is our duty to continue to support our children and foster families: some 200 persons whose survival mainly depends on us, on you who are our partners, our donors, our friends who lend us your support.

- To continue supporting the orphans of the Hope Foster Home :

The vulnerable people in the highlands region will be exposed to two threats in 2021, namely bad harvests due to the drought and above all the COVID pandemic. Similar to all West African nations Togo is a country where 8 people out of 10 have an informal poorly paid job and often struggle to make ends meet. Means of subsistence, income and well-being of numerous families have been jeopardized.

In such a context, The Friendly Haven intends to work twice as hard to support not only the orphans of the Hope Foster Home but also children living in the neighbourhood of the office of our association and widows that we have been helping since the very beginning of our presence. Without our coordinated actions, these persons might suffer from hunger and children be exposed to human trafficking and prostitution ... Together, let us continue to protect them!

- Promotion of non-violence vis-à-vis children : facilitation of sessions focused on non-violence aimed at colleges and high schools, and the community of Atakpamé, so as to heighten previous actions and contribute to an evolution of mentalities so as to sow seeds of peace since early childhood.

As regards **Rwanda**, all activities have been put on stand-by for the time being in view of the internal struggles dividing the former working partners of our regretted Kizito.



In Congo :

- Voluntary training in EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) and emergency hypnosis to support our friends of VIVERE who act as closely of possible with victims of sexual torture. We would like to give them an online training, free of charge, over several months so as to help them acquire the basics of EMDR and hypnosis, adapted to local culture and mentalities. The aim is to give them the means to act on the victims' trauma.
- Medical and legal support to the victims : It is important to reiterate the gravity of the facts that we mention in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo and we would like to get an increased support for these programmes.

## **Conclusion...**

Your help was particularly invaluable in 2020 and we would like to thank you to have made it possible for those The Friendly Haven supports to survive in a period which has been so difficult in many regards. Thanks to your help, we have been able to protect many children while poverty and risks of violence were getting worse and worse. In this grueling context which also affects our donors, you know, we also are by your side. Be sure that each and every donation means a lot, that your help changes lives, that the path of these children is already improving, thanks to you. Let us maintain hope, stay united and continue together!

### **Donations can be made :**

**by bank cheque to be addressed to:**

**« La Maison des Amis »**

**HAPPY ALPILLES, Route du Ferigoulas,  
Quartier Haut Devenson, F 13 890 Mouriès, France**

**or by bank transfer to :**

**Bank name : La Banque Postale**

**Account holder : La Maison des Amis**

**Account number : 20041 01008 2153721R029 38**

**IBAN : FR 17 2004 1010 0821 5372 1R02 938**

**BIC : PSSTFRPPMAR**